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President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 19

Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba

Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/93)

Draft resolution (A/63/L.4)

Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda): It is an honour for me to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China in the General Assembly on agenda item 19, "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

The heads of State and Government of the Group of 77 and China have repeatedly condemned the use of economic coercive measures designed to prevent countries from exercising their right to decide their own political, economic and social systems, and have called on all countries not to recognize unilateral extraterritorial laws enacted that have imposed sanctions on other States and foreign companies.

Our heads of State and Government have also recognized that the embargo has caused and continues to cause a high degree of economic and financial damage, which has had a negative impact on the welfare and well-being of the people of Cuba. The Group reiterates its call upon the Government of the United States to put an end to the embargo.

The promulgation of such acts not only undermines the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and international law, but also severely threatens freedom of trade and investment. The Group urges the United States to effect change in its dealings with the Republic of Cuba in a meaningful way by ending the embargo.

The Group is committed to working towards a better world for all in which nations, large and small, coexist peacefully. The achievement of such peaceful coexistence among nations requires adherence by all nations to the rule of law, including international law.

The embargo against Cuba contravenes the fundamental norms of international law, international humanitarian law, the Charter of the United Nations and the norms and principles governing peaceful relations among States. Its continued imposition violates the principles of the sovereign equality of States and of non-intervention and non-interference in each other's domestic affairs.

We believe that the replacement of the embargo with diplomatic dialogue and cooperation will promote meaningful exchange and partnership between countries whose destinies are linked by history and geography.

Considering the impact that the embargo has had on everyday life of the Cuban people, the overwhelming majority of Member States are here today in support of the draft resolution on the necessity of ending it. The Group of 77 and China will again support the draft resolution before us today and would

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urge all Member States in good conscience to join us in that endeavour.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to propose that the list of speakers for the debate on this item be closed.

It was so decided.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the honour to speak today on behalf of the 118 States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Non-Aligned Movement renews its commitment to defending, preserving and promoting the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We refrain from recognizing, adopting or implementing extraterritorial or unilateral coercive measures or laws, including unilateral economic sanctions, other intimidating measures and arbitrary travel restrictions that seek to exert pressure on non-aligned countries, threatening their sovereignty, independence and freedom of trade and investment, and that prevent them from exercising their right to decide, by their own free will, their own political, economic and social systems.

Such measures or laws constitute flagrant violations of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the multilateral trading system, as well as the norms and principles governing friendly relations among States. In that regard, the Non-Aligned Movement opposes and condemns such measures or laws and their continued application. The Movement is also persevering in its efforts to effectively reverse them and urges other States to do likewise, as called for by the General Assembly and other United Nations organs. Once again, the Movement requests States applying such measures or laws to revoke them fully and immediately.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that under no circumstances should people be deprived of their own means of subsistence and development. The Non-Aligned Movement further expresses its concern at the continued imposition of such measures, which inhibit the well-being of the population of the affected countries and create obstacles to the full realization of their human rights. In accordance with international law, the Movement supports the claim of affected States, including the targeted States, for compensation for the damage incurred as a consequence of the implementation of extraterritorial or unilateral coercive measures or laws.

As reaffirmed by the heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement at their Summit Conference held in Havana in September 2006, we once again call upon the Government of the United States of America to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba, which, in addition to being unilateral and contrary to the United Nations Charter, international law and the principle of good-neighbourliness, is causing huge material losses and economic damage to the people of Cuba.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its deep concern over the widening of the extraterritorial nature of the embargo against Cuba and rejects the reinforcement of the measures adopted by the United States Government aimed at tightening the embargo and all other recent measures carried out by the Government of the United States against the people of Cuba. The Movement reiterates that those measures constitute a violation of Cuba's sovereignty and a massive violation of the human rights of its people.

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement once again urges strict compliance with resolutions 47/19, 48/16, 49/9, 50/10, 51/17, 52/10, 53/4, 54/21, 55/20, 56/9, 57/11, 58/7, 59/11, 60/12, 61/11 and 62/3, on the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

Allow me to say a few words, before closing, about my dear friend and colleague, Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, who will be leaving us at the end of this week. I would like to express my appreciation as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement Troika and the appreciation of all the members of the Movement for his extensive efforts and for his able leadership as Chair of the Movement over the past two years. I wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

Mr. Talbot (Guyana): On behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that are Members of the United Nations, I have the honour to address the General Assembly on the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

CARICOM aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

At the outset, CARICOM would like to express its concern and solidarity with the people of Cuba as they struggle to rebuild in the aftermath of Hurricanes Gustav, Hanna and Ike, which battered the island and our region in quick succession. Indeed, it is in these times of natural disaster and national crisis that the fundamental unjustness of the embargo is brought into sharpest relief. Cuba's safety, advance preparedness and pace of recovery are compromised by the embargo's many direct and indirect effects. When viewed in the light of Cuba's own sacrifice and selfless assistance to other States in times of crisis, such an embargo seems particularly ill conceived.

The punitive embargo is of particular concern to CARICOM, which shares a history, culture and brotherhood with the people of Cuba. Cuba is the most populous State of the Caribbean region and an integral part of the pan-Caribbean process. Caribbean ties with Cuba have historical significance, cemented by years of active cooperation at various levels. The member States of CARICOM continue to maintain close relations with Cuba through a wide range of programmes of cooperation in areas including trade, health care, infrastructure and human resource development. Our future regional development is, in many ways, reliant upon our collective advancement and progress. In that context, we view the embargo not just as a punitive act against Cuba, but as an impediment to our shared regional development.

This year's report of the Secretary-General on the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba (A/63/93), as previous reports on the matter, outlines responses from an overwhelming majority of Member States that share a common perspective on the continued unilateral embargo against Cuba.

CARICOM member States continue to reiterate their unequivocal opposition to the imposition of the embargo, which has been repudiated by the overwhelming majority of the international community for the past 16 consecutive years. The unilateral imposition of extraterritorial laws on third States is contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the United Nations Charter, and the embargo itself runs counter to the principles of multilateralism, international law, sovereignty and free trade that this body traditionally champions.

CARICOM States therefore reaffirm the positions of the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement in opposing such unilateral actions, and we maintain the position that constructive engagement and peaceful negotiations remain the only acceptable means for advancing long-term peace and stability.

The significant effect of the embargo on the Cuban economy continues to be of great concern to CARICOM, and the humanitarian impact on the people of Cuba, especially in the area of health care and food, is saddening. The inability of Cuba to acquire necessary medical equipment, spare parts and latest-generation medicines because of the embargo continues to affect the health-care system, where treatment remains free of charge to the Cuban people.

With the strengthened and more frequent storms and hurricanes brought on by climate change and Cuba's geographic susceptibility to those natural disasters, the unacceptable humanitarian impact of the embargo becomes even more acute. It is remarkable that, even as Cuba struggles with its recent unfortunate string of natural disasters, it continues to assist other nations in the developing world, starting with its immediate Caribbean neighbours. Thousands of CARICOM students have attended Cuban universities without charge, thousands have received free surgical operations and medical assistance in Cuba, and thousands more have been treated in their home countries by Cuban doctors and nurses. We have benefited from technical expertise, capacity-building programmes, infrastructural assistance and the selfless generosity of the Cuban people. The people of Cuba have threatened no one, and neither the embargo nor its deleterious side effects have prevented them from continually extending a hand of friendship and solidarity, even across ideological divides.

Given Cuba's peaceful, generous and cooperative international stance, it should not be isolated or excluded from participation in regional and hemispheric processes. CARICOM reiterates its unwavering support for the right of the Cuban people to self-determination and to the beneficial pursuit of their social and economic development in a manner of their own choosing.

The embargo imposed against Cuba is increasingly anachronistic and serves no useful purpose in the twenty-first century. It has only served to preserve a state of tension between two neighbouring countries and to generate concern, disquiet and discomfort throughout the Caribbean.

CARICOM States continue to enjoy friendly relations with both Cuba and the United States. Those two neighbours, a mere 90 miles apart, have produced great scholars, scientists and global leaders. The two countries possess proud and noble histories and are populated by friendly, open and loving peoples. We call for a new beginning between the Governments of those two great nations — one large and one small — akin to similar initiatives taken for negotiation of far more difficult issues of international relations between States Members of this Organization. We can only imagine the positive outcome of a rapprochement between them based on the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

It is against that background that CARICOM States support the draft resolution on the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo by the United States, contained in document A/63/L.4.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, it is an honour to speak for the first time in this forum under your leadership.

Last October, 184 Member States, in this forum, voted in favour of draft resolution A/62/L.1, entitled "Neccessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba" — a nearly unanimous rejection by the international community of the interventionist policy against the fraternal people of Cuba.

Ever since its first resolution on this topic, resolution 47/19, was adopted, on 24 November 1992, the Assembly has been adopting systematically, and by an overwhelming majority resolutions that demand that the Government of the United States of America put an end to its hostile policy against Cuba. The United States Government, however, has repeatedly disdained the majority will of the General Assembly and has refused to hear the clamour throughout the world against the embargo. That is one of the many reasons that amply justify the pressing need to reform the United Nations so that the resolutions of this Assembly are welcomed and respected by all States.

The enduring embargo against Cuba runs counter to the spirit of our times. It is an obstacle to the creation of an international order based on peace and coexistence among all nations. The embargo is undeniably a criminal mechanism that is designed to crush, through hunger and disease, a dignified people that has bravely and with determination exercised its right to freedom and independence. For more than four decades, the imperialist Government has been flagrantly violating the human rights of the Cuban people, including the right to life, health, food and education. It has been violating the norms and principles of international law that govern relations among States, as well as the letter and the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

Over the past year, the embargo against Cuba has intensified and its extraterritorial implementation has expanded. To deny medicine and food to a country in the context of an odious sanctions regime is a violation of international law and is proscribed in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Mohandas Gandhi, in his work "Non-Violence: The Greatest Force", set out his thinking, which is as relevant now as it was then. The great herald of peace and permanent leader of the people of India said:

> "An armed conflict between nations horrifies us. But the economic war is no better than an armed conflict. This is like a surgical operation. An economic war is prolonged torture."

The economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba is a criminal punishment imposed systematically on the Cuban people with no distinction as to age, sex, religion or social status. In the context of the devastating human toll and material damage caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, the implications of the embargo take on more unjust and immoral connotations. Despite the embargo, the people of Cuba and their Government, faithful to the principles of solidarity and humanism, have maintained cooperation and solidarity with many developing countries, including my own, particularly in the areas of education and health.

The embargo against Cuba is rejected not only by the Cuban people, but also by a majority of world public opinion, including within the United States. To this effect, we welcome constructive rapprochement and positive dialogue which the European Union has

initiated with no conditions of any type and with respect for the sovereignty of the Cuban people. We therefore appeal for the embargo against Cuba to be lifted immediately and unconditionally.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela firmly rejects the unilateral implementation of economic, commercial and financial measures against Cuba that affect the development of international trade and that constitute an offensive extraterritorial application of one country's domestic legislation against another.

We reiterate our support for the General Assembly resolutions that call for an end to the embargo against Cuba. We support, in that context, the positions of the Group of 77 and China and of the Non-Aligned Movement and the statement soon to be delivered by the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), all of which condemn the embargo on Cuba, as it is in violation of the provisions of the United Nations Charter.

We hope that, on this occasion, the overwhelming majority of countries will once again raise their voices against a measure that is an affront to a people that has since 1958 been flying with dignity the flags of freedom, sovereignty and self-determination.

Venezuela will therefore vote in favour of the draft resolution entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): For 17 consecutive years, the Government of Mexico has, in this forum, expressed its rejection of the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba, and today it once again reiterates its opposition to the use of coercive actions not supported by the Charter of the United Nations.

Therefore, since 1992, when the Cuban Government submitted a draft resolution to the General Assembly to put an end to the embargo imposed by the Government of the United States of America, Mexico has repeatedly voted in favour of the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the matter. My Government has also shared with the international community its firm opposition to the extraterritorial application of national laws that contravene international law.

The Government of Mexico has maintained that position in the various agencies of the United Nations system supported by the fact that the United States embargo against Cuba, a unilateral policy that has lasted for almost half a century, contravenes international law and the Charter of the United Nations, has severe humanitarian consequences that are in open contradiction to its founding objectives and furthermore constitutes a renunciation of diplomacy and dialogue as ideal ways to resolve conflicts between States.

For all those reasons, my delegation reiterates its firm opposition to the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba, which has affected its population in a silent, systematic and cumulative manner.

The overwhelming outcry of the international community against this sort of unilateral action reminds us that any kind of political, economic or military sanctions imposed upon States can derive only from decisions or recommendations of the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Several agencies and entities of the United Nations system address the negative impact that the embargo has on the economic and social development of Cuba. The resulting destruction tangibly affects the economic, commercial and financial transactions of the country and has negative repercussions on sensitive sectors such as food, health and construction, all of which have a direct impact on the lives of the Cuban people.

All of those effects not only have repercussions for third countries, since they cannot interact with Cuba in many economic and social activities, but also are aggravated in the context of natural disasters such as the highly destructive storms that occurred this year, hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

The Government of Mexico reiterates its firm position against national laws that are imposed on other countries and violate international law.

In that context, and in order to counteract the economic, political and diplomatic isolation of Cuba, the Government of Mexico has supported Cuba's integration into all the regional integration mechanisms, thus promoting economic and commercial exchanges, cooperation and development. On 23 October 1996, the Mexican State passed the Law on the Protection of Commerce and Investments from Foreign Policies that

Contravene International Law. The law prohibits any acts that affect commerce or investment if those acts are a result of the extraterritorial application of the laws of foreign countries.

At the bilateral level, Mexico is also promoting political, economic and commercial contacts with Cuba. An example of that is the third meeting of the Cuba-Mexico Permanent Mechanism for Information and Political Consultation, held in March 2008, in which both Governments committed themselves to promoting existing bilateral mechanisms in the areas of migration, drug trafficking, commerce and industrial development, shipping, agriculture and fishing, foreign trade, tourism, health and development. The meeting was also instrumental in establishing mechanisms to promote economic relations through the dispatching of business missions and the revision of agreements on economic complementarity and the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments between the two countries.

By focusing on dialogue and consultation, Mexico and Cuba have managed to strengthen their ties of cooperation and understanding. That has led to a relationship based on mutual respect, as evidenced by the signing of an agreement on restructuring Cuba's debts to Mexico in March 2008. The agreement was appended to the existing regulatory framework of each country and mutually satisfactory to both parties, helping to stimulate the development of economic and trade relations benefiting the two countries.

In that context, we should also mention the signing of the memorandum of understanding between Mexico and Cuba to secure legal, orderly and safe migratory flows between both countries. The memorandum was signed during a visit by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, Felipe Pérez Roque, to Mexico City on 20 October. It will help to ensure migrants' safety, discourage undocumented migration and combat more effectively the trafficking in persons.

That relationship, which is based on mutual respect, was indeed validated through Foreign Minister Pérez Roque's visit to Mexico City only a few days ago. During his meeting with President Felipe Calderón, both noted the positive state of relations between the two countries. Besides being reflected in the structure of the bilateral institutional mechanisms, that relationship is furthered by the increase in bilateral trade, which are shows great promise. During the first eight months of this year, bilateral trade increased by nearly 80 per cent as compared to the same period in 2007. That reinforces the firm historical ties between Mexico and Cuba, which are sustained in a climate of renewed confidence, taking into consideration the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

On that basis, through bilateral dialogue and in the relevant regional and international forums and mechanisms, Mexico has promoted opportunities for cooperation and respectful dialogue, as demonstrated recently through the first ministerial-level political dialogue between the Rio Group and Cuba, held at the beginning of the current session of the General Assembly. During that dialogue, both sides stressed their interest in discussing relevant topics on the regional and international agenda.

The Government of Mexico bases its bilateral and multilateral relationships on the general principles of international law that regulate peaceful and civilized coexistence among sovereign States. Those principles have retained their solidity and continuity in the relations between Mexico and Cuba. Mexico reaffirms today that international law is the mechanism for resolving disputes between States and that observing it and respecting the rules and principles that govern coexistence among nations, as well as respectful dialogue, irrespective of asymmetries or differences, are the necessary instruments for overcoming differences among States and securing a climate of international peace.

From our own experience, we know well that societies evolve and change according to their own circumstances and not as the result of arbitrary measures imposed from outside. In virtue of all those considerations, Mexico will once again support the resolution that has been presented under the item at this session.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): For 16 consecutive years the General Assembly has debated the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba. The Assembly is meeting again today to discuss the same issue because despite the strong appeal of the international community for it to end, the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba continues.

The resolutions on the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba which the Assembly has adopted with near unanimity, have never been implemented. We fully align ourselves with the statements made by the delegates of Antigua and Barbuda and of Egypt on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement, respectively, in that connection.

The United States' unilateral economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba represents a violation of international law, including international laws relating to the freedom of trade and navigation and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. It runs counter to universally recognized norms governing relations between sovereign countries regardless of their political systems and their choice of a path of development and to the fundamental principles, purposes and spirit enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

The prolonged and intensified embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba has caused serious economic and trade damage worth scores of billions of United States dollars not only to Cuba, but also to other countries desirous of conducting their normal and mutually beneficial economic, financial and trade relations with that peace-loving country. It has inflicted tremendous hardship and suffering on the Cuban people, particularly women and children. While the Government and people of Cuba strive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, that unjustifiable unilateral embargo affects their efforts to accomplish the very goals that leaders of the world adopted at this Assembly eight years ago.

Viet Nam is against the imposition of any coercive, unilateral and extraterritorial economic, commercial or trade embargo by one country against another. We believe that disputes among States should and can be resolved through peaceful dialogue and negotiations on the basis of equality, mutual respect for each other's independence and sovereignty, and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States. We demand that the United States put an end to the unilateral embargo against Cuba, the continuation of which serves no other purpose than to intensify tension between the two neighbouring countries and in the region and is a disservice to regional and international peace and security and the interests of friendly relations among peoples.

Viet Nam reaffirms its support for and solidarity with the Government and people of Cuba. We will join the efforts of the international community to help them overcome the consequences of the embargo. Viet Nam will again vote in favour of the draft resolution.

Mr. Mohamad (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to extend to you, Sir, our warmest thanks and appreciation and to applaud your wise leadership of the proceedings of the current session of the General Assembly. We greatly appreciate your efforts to spread the spirit of fraternity, equality, justice, cooperation and respect for peoples to choose and to reject hegemony and the law of force.

For the seventeenth consecutive year, an item on the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba is on the agenda of the General Assembly. Throughout those years, the Assembly, by adopting the draft resolutions presented to it, has demonstrated its complete rejection of those unilateral sanctions and their extraterritorial negative effects that run counter to the principles of international legitimacy.

The General Assembly is once again considering the item amid an increasing awareness on the part of the international community and its rejection of the dangerous and unjustifiable imposition of the sanctions. The continuous support for the resolution — year in and year out — explicitly demonstrates the rejection by the international community of the unilateral imposition of the embargo on Cuba, due to its blatant violation of the basic rules and principles of international law, the provisions of the United Nations Charter and the international instruments and norms governing commercial, economic and financial relations among States.

The long suffering of the Cuban people as a result of the embargo serves as an appeal to the international community to take a stand once again this year against those unjust sanctions that threaten international legitimacy. Those unilateral measures have had a severe impact on the Cuban people, depriving them of basic necessities and causing considerable losses in the various fields of economic and social development to the brotherly Republic of Cuba for over 40 years. My delegation takes a firm stand against those unjust unilateral sanctions, which have also been imposed on my country and on other countries. We wish here to

express our full solidarity with Cuba and against the policies of exclusion and the imposition of hegemony on other people.

We are confident that the overwhelming vote of the General Assembly will support the desire of the international community to achieve the noble humanitarian principles contained in the Charter. The draft resolution under consideration serves in its symbolic value as an important message from the international community, rejecting the folly of force.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): May I begin by associating my delegation with the statements delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

On New Year's Eve 2009, we will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Cuban revolution. In honour of that day we must pay tribute to former President Fidel Castro, who led the revolution for the self-determination of the Cuban people. Yet three years after the Cuban victory led by Comandante Fidel, Cuba was hit with a unilateral economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on it by its neighbour, the United States of America. That means that the majority of Cuban citizens have known no other life than a life under coercive economic measures. But despite everything, the Cuban people have survived. For that reason we begin today by welcoming the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, whose presence at the debate is an indication of the importance we all attach to the issue.

Throughout the unilateral embargo, which has lasted over 48 years, the Cuban people have responded by extending a hand of friendship and solidarity to other people around the world. For instance, it is not unusual to find Cuban doctors and Cuban nurses in many parts of Latin America and Africa. Cuba's outstanding work in the areas of health, education and biotechnology is recognized by the international community. Also, through its bilateral cooperation projects, Cuba is greatly assisting many developing countries — including mine — in addressing skills shortages by deploying Cuban professional workers and trainers in a myriad of areas.

Perhaps more importantly, Cuba has supported the struggles for freedom and justice around the world. For instance, in Southern Africa we have recognized Cuba's contribution to our own freedom and democracy in our subregion. The role that Cuba played in South Africa's own liberation history was duly recognized this year when Southern Africa celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, which was a decisive turning point in the struggle against apartheid and led to the independence of Namibia and South Africa.

South Africa has consistently opposed all aspects of the embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba for fundamental reasons that go beyond the solidarity we share with the Cuban people. South Africa is a country committed to working towards a better world for all in which all nations, no matter how large or small, coexist peacefully. The achievement of such peaceful coexistence among nations requires adherence by all nations to the rule of law, including international law and respect for territorial integrity.

South Africa views the continued imposition of an economic, commercial and financial embargo as a violation of the principles of the sovereign equality of States and of non-intervention and non-interference in one other's domestic affairs. South Africa has therefore repeatedly joined the vast majority of Member States and countries in expressing its disagreement and its opposition to all aspects of the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

We are guided by the basic norms of international law and conduct and our principled support for the need to eliminate coercive economic measures as a means of achieving political and economic goals. South Africa believes that constructive dialogue can foster mutual trust and understanding and can engender harmony and peaceful coexistence between nations.

My delegation believes that the presence of such a large number of Member States in this Hall today and their participation in the deliberations are indications of their opposition to unilateral extraterritorial measures. We are here to express our firm opposition to coercive economic measures as a means of exerting pressure on developing countries, as such measures are contrary to international law, international humanitarian law, the United Nations Charter and the norms and principles governing peaceful relations among States.

South Africa will join the majority in the Assembly this morning in supporting the draft resolution before us. We do so because this relentless and unilateral action has caused untold suffering to the people of Cuba. We believe that the overwhelming majority of Member States present today will join us in support for the Cuban people. It is a clear indication that the time has come for the embargo to be lifted, thereby ending the untold suffering of the Cuban civilian population, who are bearing the brunt of this injustice.

Finally, Mr. President, with your permission, since I will not be able to join the celebrations in Havana on New Year's Day, allow me to just say "Viva Cuba! Viva Comandante Fidel!"

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation supports the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

For more than 10 years, the Cuban delegation has denounced each and every year from the podium of the General Assembly the sustained economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba, which has had serious consequences for its social, economic and environmental development. The embargo has had an extensive impact on Cuba, especially in compromising the right to the survival and development of the most vulnerable groups in Cuba, such as women and children, and has gained broad sympathy and attention.

For 16 consecutive years, the General Assembly has each year adopted a resolution by an overwhelming majority, urging all countries to comply with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law by repealing or invalidating all laws and measures with extraterritorial effects that compromise the sovereignty of other States and undermine the legitimate rights and interests of entities and individuals under the jurisdictions of those countries and affect the freedom of trade and navigation. Regrettably, however, the long-term economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba imposed by its rich neighbour is still in place.

In today's world, although international relations are not yet democratized, dialogue, communication and harmonious coexistence have emerged as the mainstream of international relations. Mutual respect and equality among countries are becoming important issues of international consensus. In the age of economic globalization, exchanges and cooperation among countries on an equal footing represent the trend of our times. Dialogue on an equal footing and friendly consultation are the best way to resolve any differences and disputes. The international community has the right to raise serious concerns over the embargo and sanctions suffered by Cuba over the years and to request the country concerned to end the embargo and sanctions.

The embargo and sanctions against Cuba not only harm the interests of Cuba and many other countries, but also run counter to the principles of democracy, freedom, the rule of law and human rights. First, the practice of attempting to force another country, through embargo and sanctions, to give up its right to independently choose its own path of development and even to overthrow its Government constitutes a serious violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter and the basic norms governing contemporary international relations. Such practice has nothing to do with promoting democracy and freedom.

Secondly, the embargo and sanctions imposed against Cuba are extraterritorial in nature and therefore in violation of international law and can by no means promote democracy and freedom in any country. They are opposed by all countries and run counter to the principle of trade liberalization.

Thirdly, the embargo and sanctions have seriously obstructed and constrained the efforts of the Cuban people to eradicate poverty, improve their living standards, pursue economic and social development and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. They undermine the right of the Cuban people to subsistence and development. The international community is now facing the serious challenge of a global food crisis and the ensuing, worsening problems of hunger and malnutrition, which make the embargo and sanctions more unreasonable than ever.

The Chinese Government always maintains that countries should develop their relations in compliance with the purposes and principles of the Charter and work to promote democracy and the rule of law in international relations. We believe that the right of each country to choose its own social system and the path of development should be respected. Differences between States should be resolved through dialogue and cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

In view of all that, the Chinese Government calls for the lifting of the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the country concerned against Cuba at an early date. It is our hope that there will be dialogue rather than confrontation, and engagement and exchanges rather than embargo and sanctions. We hope the country concerned will implement the relevant resolution of the General Assembly without delay. China therefore supports the draft resolution submitted by Cuba under the current agenda item.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to associate my delegation with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Algeria wishes to express once again its serious concern regarding the continuation of the economic, commercial and financial embargo unilaterally imposed for nearly half a century now by the United States of America against Cuba. Algeria reiterates its appeal for the lifting of the embargo against the Cuban people, under which 70 per cent of Cuban citizens were born.

Algeria considers that the economic, commercial and financial embargo of Cuba is a violation of the principles of sovereign equality of States and non-interference in the internal affairs of States, and also violates the right of the Cuban people to development and sovereignty.

The extraterritorial nature of the legislation of one State seeking to impose unilateral sanctions on another constitutes a denial of the principles enshrined in the Charter and runs counter to international law.

Algeria wishes to reaffirm its adherence to the position adopted by the fourteenth summit of the Non-Aligned Movement held in September 2006 in Havana, and to that adopted during the Second South Summit in June 2005 in Doha, both of which rejected coercive economic measures and extraterritorial laws imposed on developing countries, and called on the United States to lift the embargo against Cuba.

In renewing its appeal to the United States of America to lift its embargo against Cuba, which has been continuously rejected by a growing number of countries in the Assembly, indicating that the overwhelming majority of Member States are in favour of lifting that embargo, my delegation would like to indicate that it will vote in favour of the draft resolution A/63/L.4.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report under agenda item 19, "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba" (A/63/93). My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The content of resolution 62/3, which was supported by 184 votes in its favour last year, clearly reflects the position of the international community towards the long-standing embargo against Cuba. My delegation reiterates its belief that the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba runs counter to the principle of international law governing relations among States and contradicts the letter and spirit of the Charter, which calls for promoting solidarity, cooperation and friendly relations among nations.

Such measures continue to have an adverse impact on the living conditions and human rights of the Cuban people and will hamper the efforts of the Cuban Government to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. In that context, the embargo is hampering the efforts of the Cuban Government to eradicate poverty and hunger and to promote health and education, which are indispensable to the achievement of economic and social development.

Paragraph 101 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (A/CONF.199/20) stipulates that "States should cooperate to promote a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries". Paragraph 102 of the same document calls upon States to refrain from any unilateral measure that contravenes international law and the Charter of the United Nations and impedes the full achievement of economic and social development by the population of the affected countries, in particular women and children.

Nowadays, resorting to unjustifiable coercive economic measures against other States on the basis of political observations is not acceptable to the

international community. The extraterritorial application of domestic laws, such as the Helms-Burton Act and the D'Amato Act, creates an antagonistic environment in international relations and adversely affects world peace and security. Such political acts with economic implications continue to restrict the investment, trade, employment, technology transfer and prospects for economic growth not only of the targeted countries, but also of third-party countries dealing with the affected country.

There is no doubt that the blockade is in violation of the internationally agreed principles governing relations among States, such as the sovereign equality of States, non-intervention in their internal affairs and freedom of international trade and navigation. In previous statements, my delegation has repeatedly stressed that unilateral coercive economic policies and measures should be regarded as major impediments to the international community's pursuit of its common causes and interests. Such measures have negative impacts on the promotion of cooperation and partnerships that are necessary to create a favourable environment, to the benefit of all at the international level.

The reports of the Cuban Government on the impacts of the embargo imposed on it clearly indicate that such unilateral coercive measures have been conducive to furthering disparities in the areas of health, economy, education and training, trade, tourism, civil aviation and even cultural activities. The adoption of 17 consecutive resolutions up to 2007 by the General Assembly is the wise and laudable reaction of the international community to such unacceptable measures. They call upon all States to refrain from applying such laws and measures and to take the steps necessary to repeal or invalidate them as soon as possible. The reason is clear. Resorting to an embargo as a tool to achieve political objectives undermines the collective efforts of Member States to achieve economic growth and sustainable development at the national, regional and international levels.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to express its sincere hope that those Member States that still continue to apply unilateral coercive economic laws and measures take the steps necessary to repeal or invalidate them at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Shukla (India): We associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 in his capacity as its Chair. We thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/63/93) on the agenda item under consideration today.

This is the seventeenth successive year that this Assembly is deliberating the 46-year economic, commercial and financial embargo on Cuba. In its deliberations, the Assembly has repeatedly rejected the imposition of laws and regulations with extraterritorial impact and all other forms of coercive economic measures. The General Assembly has also called upon all States to respect their obligations under the United Nations Charter and international law and to repeal and invalidate laws and measures that have extraterritorial affect on the sovereignty of other States, the legitimate interests of entities or persons under their jurisdiction, and the freedom of trade and navigation.

Despite repeated calls by the General Assembly, its resolutions remain unimplemented, in contravention of world opinion. The embargo, particularly its extraterritorial aspects, continues to remain in force. In particular, domestic United States laws, such as the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act of 1996, have enhanced the extraterritorial reach of the embargo by encompassing foreign companies, as well as foreign subsidiaries of United States companies, doing business with Cuba or Cuban entities. We support the categorical rejection by the international community of domestic laws with extraterritorial impact.

The embargo, particularly through its extraterritorial effects, is adversely affecting the Cuban people and the development efforts of the country. Health care is particularly affected due to access controls on critical medical equipment, medicines, technologies and diagnostic aids, apart from the enhanced cost of supplies. In that regard, Cuba's efforts to provide assistance to fellow developing countries as part of South-South cooperation have also borne the brunt of the embargo, making that another unexpected indirect negative extraterritorial impact of the embargo.

Various other areas of the Cuban economy have also been adversely impacted. Those have been elaborated upon in the report of the Secretary-General by various United Nations entities. For example, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Havana has noted that the negative impact of the embargo

permeates the social, economic and environmental dimensions of human development in Cuba, severely affecting the most vulnerable socio-economic groups of the Cuban population.

Further, the embargo seriously affects the implementation of projects and programmes of the United Nations system in Cuba, including the travel of United Nations staff. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has stated that the embargo significantly affects the standard of living of Cuban citizens. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development states that the extraterritorial impact is considerable owing to significant United States interests in transnational corporations.

Despite the embargo, the United States of America continues to be a major source of imports for Cuba, insofar as the United States Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000 permits. That only serves to confirm the potential for trade, commerce and investment between those countries. The embargo also has considerable detrimental effect on United States trade and business opportunities. The various efforts in the United States to relax or lift the embargo indicate the substantial interest, particularly in the business sector, in unhindered access to the Cuban market or contact with Cuba. We therefore look forward to the lifting of sanctions and the embargo against Cuba.

Before concluding, I should like to reiterate India's opposition to unilateral measures by countries that impinge on the sovereignty of another country, including attempts to extend the application of a country's laws extraterritorially to other sovereign nations.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome the participation in today's discussion of Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba. We wish to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/63/93, which reflects the unanimous and unequivocal objection of Member States to the imposition of the unilateral and extraterritorial economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba.

Russia's position on the draft resolution (A/63/L.4) introduced under the agenda item has not changed. Our country shares the view of the overwhelming majority of Member States, which resolutely condemns the United States embargo against Cuba and calls for its end. Since 1994, Russia has been supporting resolutions to that effect at sessions of the General Assembly and has consistently adhered to the position that it is inadmissible to carry out unilateral measures of an extraterritorial nature in international relations.

On 17 October 2008, an appeal was adopted by the parliament of Russia, the State Duma of the Russian Federation, entitled, "To the parliaments of United Nations Member States and international parliamentary organizations concerning the necessity of ending the economic embargo against the Republic of Cuba and helping the Republic of Cuba to eliminate the devastating effects of natural disaster". The appeal emphasizes that "the continuing economic blockade against the Republic of Cuba is an act of crude pressure by the United States of America against a sovereign State".

The continuing commercial, economic and financial blockade of Cuba by the United States is counterproductive and out of step with the spirit of the times in which we live. It is a remnant from the days of the cold war that is hampering the establishment of a new and just world order in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

We are convinced that putting an end to the embargo and normalization of United States-Cuba relations in general would help to improve the situation with regard to Cuba and help to further integrate Cuba into regional and global processes. The continuation of the blockade is also incompatible with the efforts now under way to reform the United Nations, for it ignores the unanimous view of Member States regarding the need to work together to implement the principles underpinning our efforts to abandon confrontation and embrace cooperation based on respect for the rights of nations to choose for themselves their political, economic and social systems.

Cuba was badly hit by Hurricane Gustav at the end of August 2008. The Russian Federation gave a helping hand and continues to assist in eliminating the consequences of that natural disaster. We are convinced that putting an end to the embargo and strengthening international efforts in general to support the rehabilitation of the Cuban economy would significantly alleviate the situation in the affected areas.

Guided by the fundamental principles of the Charter with regard to the inadmissibility of any discriminatory measure or interference in the internal affairs of States, Russia will continue its policy to vote in favour of the draft resolution calling for an end to the blockade.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): The Angolan delegation associates itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Each year for 16 consecutive years, the General Assembly has adopted a resolution urging all countries, in compliance with the United Nations Charter and the principles of international law, to retract all laws and measures with extraterritorial effects that compromise the sovereignty of other States, undermine the legitimate rights and interests of entities and persons under jurisdiction of those States and affect the freedom of trade and navigation.

Regrettably, however, the long-term economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba imposed by the United States of America is still in place. In this era of economic globalization, exchanges and cooperation among countries on an equal footing is the trend of our times. Normal economic, commercial and financial ties among countries are therefore in the interest of all and are by no means a favour done by any one country to others.

The General Assembly has before it the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/93) containing replies from Member States and organs and agencies of the United Nations system on the implementation of the pertinent General Assembly resolutions calling for an end to the embargo. According to that report, there has been no improvement, i.e. action to end the embargo, during all these years. The existing sanctions have been applied with vigour, and the embargo measures have continued to have a serious impact on Cuba, causing enormous social and material loss, economic damage, hunger, and disease to the people of Cuba, while simultaneously affecting third countries in their relations with Cuba.

The extraterritorial policy of the embargo threatens the sovereignty of States and the legitimate interests of persons, entities, institutions and companies under their jurisdiction, as well as the freedom to establish economic, commercial, financial and scientific and technical relations with the Republic of Cuba and thus affects their social and economic development. For that reason, we are of the view that the issue we are addressing today is important, not only for Cuba but also for all members of the international community. That view has been expressed by a majority of Member States year after year.

The United States of America has imposed the economic, financial and commercial embargo against Cuba for too long. The embargo does not benefit either of the two countries. On the contrary, it serves only to maintain a level of tension in the region and, above all, it has been causing the severe suffering of the Cuban people, a situation which has been exacerbated by climatic changes and more particularly during the hurricane season and hurricanes Gustav and Ike of this year.

The embargo goes against the very core of the United Nations Charter, as well as all of the principles of cooperation and dialogue among States, laws governing international trade and related conventions.

By adhering to the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the spirit of all relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, we reaffirm our commitment to the norms of international law by supporting the need to eliminate coercive economic measures as a means of political and economic persuasion.

Attendance by delegations of the General Assembly at debates is a good measure of the importance of the issue on the agenda. In that connection, I wish to warmly greet and welcome the presence of Mr. Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba.

Delegations participate very actively in the debate on the question of the embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States and vote overwhelmingly year after year against that embargo, which is a clear indication of the injustice and unpopularity of the United States measure.

In view of the above, the Angolan Government supports draft resolution A/63/L.4 submitted by Cuba under the current agenda item, since the embargo contravenes international law and flagrantly violates the sovereign equality of States and the principles of non-intervention and non-interference in domestic affairs.

Mr. Kapambwe (Zambia): Earlier in the day, the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda and Egypt made statements on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement, respectively. My delegation wishes to associate itself with both those statements.

My delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/63/93, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba". The report reiterates the position of the General Assembly over the years to the effect that the embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba hurts innocent people in Cuba.

Last year, and indeed in previous years, Zambia was among the overwhelming majority of States Members of the United Nations that voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 62/3, calling for the lifting of the embargo.

Zambia has consistently expressed concern over the continued economic embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba, not only because it is unjust towards the people of Cuba, but also because its unilateral and extraterritorial effects are a breach of the international principles of free trade and navigation espoused by the United Nations.

Zambia will again vote in favour of draft resolution A/63/L.4, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo by the United States of America against Cuba". Our vote is based on our firm commitment to strengthen universal respect for international law in the conduct of all forms of relations among sovereign States and our belief in the sanctity of the Charter of the United Nations. We further believe that differences between the United States of America and Cuba should be resolved through dialogue and negotiation.

Zambia reaffirms its appeal to the international community to support the call for the immediate lifting of the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

Mr. Godard (United States of America): The position of the United States on this draft resolution (A/63/L.4) is well known. Each of the States Members of the United Nations has the sovereign right to conduct its own trade with another country as it sees fit, subject only to the treaty obligations it has freely undertaken.

As a bilateral issue relating to the efforts of the United States to mitigate the impact of the repressive policies of the Cuban Government towards its own people, we believe it is highly inappropriate that the General Assembly of the United Nations consider that resolution. As we have noted in the past, at various times many other States or regional groups have taken actions to restrict their exports to and imports from other States for a variety of reasons. There is no doubt that Member States represented here today would vigorously defend their right to determine their own national trade policy if it were called into question.

Cuba asserts that the economic sanctions imposed by the United States on the Cuban Government cause serious damage to the welfare of the Cuban people. In fact, as we have conclusively demonstrated since the General Assembly first began debating this draft resolution in 1992, the trade policy of the United States towards Cuba is carefully designed to allow the Cuban people access to food and humanitarian goods, but to limit the ability of Cuba's repressive Government to benefit and consolidate power through its authoritarian control over the Cuban economy. Above all, our trade policy seeks to keep away from Cuba's leaders resources that they would use to strengthen their repressive political and economic system.

Indeed, the American people remain the largest providers of humanitarian aid to the Cuban people. In 2007, the American people provided $240.5 million in private humanitarian assistance. That was in the form of gift parcels filled with food and other basic necessities to the tune of $179.4 million. Also, there were non-agricultural humanitarian donations of $20.6 million and medical donations of $40.5 million.

In addition to offering Government assistance, the United States has increased existing authorizations for United States-based non-governmental organizations to provide larger amounts of humanitarian assistance, including in the form of cash donations, to help address the basic needs of the Cuban people. We have already authorized over $10 million in private cash donations.

In 2008, the United States has been especially sensitive to the plight of the Cuban people in light of the devastation suffered throughout the Caribbean. Cuba has suffered great damage from hurricanes Gustav

and Ike since the end of August. Some assistance has been delivered through non-governmental relief and humanitarian organizations, but more is needed to help the Cuban people, and, under those extraordinary circumstances, the United States Government stands ready to provide that assistance.

On four separate occasions, the United States Government has offered to provide the Cuban people with up to $5 million in emergency humanitarian assistance for those in dire need. On 3 September 2008, the United States Government issued a disaster declaration in response to the damage caused by Hurricane Gustav and made available an initial $100,000 in cash relief assistance to humanitarian organizations working in Cuba.

The United States Government also offered to provide a humanitarian assessment team — something we usually do in such instances — to assist in producing rapid emergency assessments of health, sanitation, water, shelter and food supply to help in the organization of the relief effort. That offer was rejected by the Cuban Government.

In the wake of the damage caused by Hurricane Ike, the United States Government set aside an additional $200,000 for non-governmental relief organizations and reiterated our offer to provide a humanitarian assessment team. Again, the Cuban Government rejected our offer.

On 13 September of this year, as information on the extensive damage from the hurricanes became known, the United States Government offered a relief package of roughly $5 million that included an unconditional offer of humanitarian assistance to benefit 135,000 Cuban hurricane victims and continued assistance to non-governmental organizations. For the third time, the Cuban Government rejected our offer.

On 19 September 2008, the United States Government offered unconditionally to provide relief supplies directly to the Cuban Government at a value of approximately $5 million. Those supplies are composed of family emergency shelters and household kits that could assist up to 48,000 Cubans affected by the hurricanes. The Cuban Government has not responded to that offer of assistance.

As is well known, United States law permits the sale of medicine, medical supplies and agricultural products to Cuba. Indeed, the United States is Cuba's top supplier of food. United States producers exported $448 million in agricultural products to Cuba in 2007. Since Hurricane Ike struck on 7 September, the United States has licensed $396 million in agricultural sales to Cuba. Lumber, an important construction material, is included in the category of agricultural sales. The United States has authorized $53 million in humanitarian donations by United States entities to hurricane victims, including building materials to help storm victims to repair their homes. We have also authorized gift parcel consolidators to export $124 million in gift parcels to Cuba.

Despite that clear demonstration of United States interest in the welfare of the Cuban people, Cuban officials, including the chief of mission in Washington, Jorge Bolaños Suárez, continue to make outrageous statements about the nature of the United States sanctions. It is indicative of the lack of interest that the Castro regime has in the well-being of its own people that it would refuse sincere offers of assistance, choosing instead to prolong their suffering as a pretext for proposing draft resolutions such as the one on which we will vote today.

In conclusion, let me remind the Assembly that the real reason that the Cuban economy is in terrible condition and that so many Cubans remain mired in poverty is that Cuba's regime continues to deny its people their basic human and economic rights. Indeed, one Latin American observer described Cuba as an "undeveloping" country thanks to the policies of the Castro regime that have turned it from one of the region's most prosperous economies into one of its poorest. We again invite Member States, as we have done consistently in debating this draft resolution in past years, to reject the false arguments of the Cuban Government and to focus on effecting a transition in Cuba that would restore its people's fundamental rights.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first time that I have addressed the General Assembly at its present session, I wish to express my deepest satisfaction at seeing you, Sir, an example of the dignity of our people, leading our deliberations. We know that your commitment to peace and justice will guide our work. As always, you have Nicaragua's full support with a view to success in your efforts.

Nicaragua aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Once again, we are meeting as a result of the imperative need to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the Government of the United States of America against the heroic and generous people and Government of Cuba, and the General Assembly will adopt a draft resolution calling for an end to that criminal and inhumane blockade. It has been amply demonstrated that no one in the world supports that measure. It is truly sad to see that the Government of a people as generous as the people of the United States is capable of being so mean-spirited and greedy as to try to crush the spirit of independence, self-determination and internationalist solidarity that characterizes the Government and the people of Cuba — a spirit that they will never give up.

What suffering in human, social, economic and cultural terms has been caused to the Cuban people by these policies of the Government of the United States! This blockade and this suffering must end. We cannot allow a country to continue to manipulate international law and the Charter of the United Nations according to its whim. How many more draft resolutions will the General Assembly have to adopt to put an immediate end to this criminal blockade?

Cases such as this lead us to think about the imperative need to make General Assembly resolutions binding and mandatory, so that we can truly promote, defend and deepen democracy and its values in our great House, the United Nations family. No argument that the United States of America can use will ever justify this aggression against and violation of international law, the norms of coexistence among nations, international freedom of trade and navigation and the United Nations Charter itself, which all of us claim to defend and respect.

Nicaragua condemns in the strongest terms those policies of pressure and blackmail. It was not so long ago that Nicaragua was a victim of the same policy of blockade and blackmail, including external military aggression, by the Government of the United States of that era. Once again, we express our unconditional solidarity with the Government and the people of Cuba and demand an immediate end to this criminal blockade. We reiterate that disputes between States must be addressed through dialogue and negotiation, without any preconditions and on an equal footing between the parties involved.

Despite this blockade, and the restrictions that it imposes, there is no people that, at times of need or disaster, has not received the disinterested aid, support and humanitarian assistance of all those Cuban doctors, teachers and technicians, who live among our people, sharing our hopes and dreams for a more humane world.

We await the moment when good sense and intelligence will prevail, when we will become witnesses to a genuine change that will redress these obsolete policies that do not contribute to peace, development or strengthening good relationships among peoples.

In recent months, American media have been reporting about an historic opportunity in the society of that country, referring to change. We hope that the change, about which so much has been said, will be positive change, similar to what is happening in Latin America and the Caribbean. We hope that these changes will support development, respect for the sovereign decisions of our peoples and that, once and for all, the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba will be lifted.

We wish to express our affection, respect and admiration for the five Cuban patriotic heroes, who have served ten years in maximum security prisons in the United States. We demand the immediate release of these five heroes, who sacrificed themselves to defend their homeland and combat the terrorism that is exerted against the Cuban people.

In conclusion, we would like to recognize Commandante Fidel as one of the greatest fighters for peace and solidarity of our days. The light of hope that was lit by the Cuban revolution can never be extinguished by this infamous blockade.

Mr. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): Saint Vincent and the Grenadines associates itself with the statements made on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 and China.

The year 2008 marks the seventeenth consecutive year that the United Nations is considering a draft resolution on this topic (A/63/L.4). Seventeen years ago, this draft resolution seemed to be an apt postscript to a troubling chapter in world history. The Berlin Wall had come down two years earlier, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had been dissolved and the so-called Iron Curtain had been lifted. The cold war logic of dividing the world into competing spheres and separating ideological foe from friend by blockades, walls and embargoes was giving way to a realization that every nation is closely interconnected, and to a commitment to link our societies and markets together through globalization, trade and tighter coordination. Regional cooperation and integration flourished and accelerated, in the European Union, the African Union, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and CARICOM, to name but a few.

Today, 17 years later, globalization — for better and for worse — has taken hold, and the world recognizes the fundamental interconnectedness of our markets, our economies, our commercial interests and, indeed, our peoples. We are one global village, with a singular mission of eliminating artificial barriers between and among one another.

The developments of the last 17 years, therefore, give inexorable rise to the question: why is Cuba still the subject of a cold war embargo, when the cold war itself has long since ceased to exist? Seldom has a more ill-conceived, illogical and illegal measure been applied so punitively, and for so long to a people so wholly undeserving of such punishment.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines wishes to take this opportunity to extend its most profound and heartfelt gratitude to the people of Cuba, who have graduated over 200 Vincentian university students and who are currently playing host to 150 more, and whose surgeons performed operations on over 3,000 patients who required the care of ophthalmologists. Quite literally, they brought sight to the blind. We would like to thank Cuba for her doctors, who bring medical care and expertise to rural areas of our country, and for her engineers and architects and workers, who are currently assisting us in the construction of a hospital and an international airport.

As far wealthier nations and institutions have looked askance at our developmental struggles and offered only dubious prescriptions, platitudes and trite clichés, the Cuban people have rolled up their sleeves and given freely of themselves in a manner that has touched the hearts and souls of the Vincentian people.

The United States of America has the sovereign right to trade with whom it chooses, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines would not presume to advise any State with regard to its bilateral trading arrangements. However, the extraterritorial application of domestic law is a violation of our Charter and a contravention of the underpinnings of our modern notions of global trade and international relations. It does violence to the rights of self-determination and sovereign equality. Further, the member States of CARICOM — all staunch friends of the United States — also suffer from this embargo, because it affects Cuba's considerable potential as the largest and most populous Caribbean island to act as an economic engine for the region, and engenders unnecessary tension in our peaceful waters.

The economic fate of Cuba and the wider Caribbean cannot be subject to the whims of local pressure groups, no matter their relative influence. Domestic considerations cannot outweigh the inalienable rights of over 11 million Cubans or create exceptions to the bedrock principles of our international community and our market systems.

The specific ideological divides that drove this embargo no longer apply. Today, Western Europe is buying oil piped in from Russia and shipped from Iran. The United States is one of China's largest trading partners, and the capitals of unfettered laissez-faire capitalism are now embracing nationalizations and other massive state interventions in their free markets. The old lines have so blurred as to become meaningless. As an ideological tool, the embargo is a relic of a bygone era.

This embargo has not blockaded Cuban culture, the undeniable power of which has enriched the shores of south Florida and the world. This embargo has not contained Cuba's peerless athletic brilliance, which thrills the world in countless competitive forums. This embargo has not thwarted Cuba's standing in the marketplace of ideas, where it competes on an equal persuasive footing with others. And this embargo has not curtailed the Cuban generosity of body and spirit to which the poor and struggling peoples of Africa, Asia,

Latin America and the Caribbean can eloquently attest. It has only caused the unnecessary suffering of a proud and noble people, who are nonetheless neither bowed nor broken by what is an increasingly indefensible act.

Indeed, there is troubling anecdotal evidence that ideological zealots and washed-up terrorists seek to exploit the existence of this embargo to suit their own nefarious designs. Cuba, the victim of modern terrorism as far back as the Cubana Airlines bombing in 1976, and the United States, cruelly and tragically attacked as recently as 11 September 2001, have common cause in the fight against terrorism, and both have heroic patriots standing guard, at home and abroad, to protect their nations against such savagery. In a world united in the war on terrorism, the embargo cannot stand as a flickering flame to which the moths of barbarism are drawn.

José Martí, the apostle of Cuban independence, once said:

> "Like stones rolling down hills, fair ideas reach their objectives despite all obstacles and barriers. It may be possible to speed or hinder them, but impossible to stop them."

The necessity of ending this embargo is a fair idea whose time has come. It has been hindered by 17 years of obstacles thus far, but its inexorable path to fruition is undeniable. Let us dally no longer in the dusty corners of historical recriminations. Let us instead agree collectively that it is time to change, to move on with our globalized, multilateral, multicultural, multipolar experiment, to look to the future with hope and to correct this historical travesty.

Mr. Iddi (United Republic of Tanzania): For the last 16 consecutive years, this Assembly has been calling for an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba. It is unfortunate that all the calls of this body have been to no avail. Today, for the seventeenth time, the delegation of Tanzania joins others in renewing the appeal for the expeditious lifting of the embargo against Cuba.

We align ourselves with the statements made by the representatives by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report in document A/63/93, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba". The responses from Member States, as reflected in the Secretary-General's report, clearly show that the international community does not support the embargo and that it is sympathetic to the plight of the people of Cuba.

My delegation is seriously concerned by the negative effect of the embargo on the social, economic and environmental dimensions of human development in Cuba. The embargo is severely affecting the most vulnerable socio-economic groups of the Cuban population, as was seen during the recent hurricanes Gustav and Ike, when there was no consideration for humanitarian support. We are further concerned that the embargo severely affects the implementation of United Nations projects and programmes in Cuba. It is ironic that that is happening when the international community is trying to meet internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Thus the need to end the embargo against Cuba should be viewed not only against the backdrop of politics and power, but also on moral and humanitarian grounds. It is our conviction that lifting the embargo would help not only to alleviate the socio-economic conditions and suffering of the Cuban people, but also to promote dialogue, understanding and good-neighbourliness among States and, hence, development, peace and security.

This Assembly cannot afford to remain indifferent to the suffering of the people of Cuba. Our shared history and collective experience have shown that, in comparison to cooperation and dialogue, isolation, the embargo and unilateralism have not been effective. Thus we feel there is a need to encourage dialogue between the United States of America and Cuba. We also need to explore other approaches beyond passing resolutions, so as to persuade the United States of America to lift the embargo against the Government of Cuba and its people.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates its sympathy for the people and the Government of Cuba and, in solidarity with other Member States, joins them in calling for an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on Cuba.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister

for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, to introduce draft resolution A/63/L.4.

Mr. Pérez Roque (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President — dear Father Miguel d'Escoto — I would like once again to welcome your election and your presence at this debate. You are the incarnation here today of the voice of the people, the voice of the humble. You can rely on Cuba, Father.

As in every year since 1992, we appear before the General Assembly to call for the lifting of the illegal and unjust blockade imposed by the Government of the United States against Cuba for the past almost 50 years. Seven out of every ten Cubans have spent their entire lives under that irrational and worthless policy that attempts, with no success, to bring our people to their knees. The blockade is older than Mr. Barack Obama and everyone in my generation.

The vote that is going to take place within a few minutes is occurring in very special circumstances, after the devastating passage of two powerful hurricanes through Cuba, when we are just six days away from the United States elections and against the background of a profound international economic crisis, to which none of our countries is immune.

The more than 500,000 homes and thousands of schools and health institutions affected, a third of cultivated land devastated and severe destruction of the electrical and communications infrastructure, among other damage, are the result of natural phenomena that have never been seen before and that are proof of the effects of climatic changes on the countries in the Caribbean.

The loss of human lives was minimal because of the enormous effort made earlier by the authorities and the people, enabling the evacuation of and protection for 3.2 million people in safe locations. After all, it was Cuba, and not New Orleans at the time of hurricane Katrina. Despite the heavy damage and devastation caused by the hurricanes, no sick person in Cuba lacked medical assistance. All Cuban children and the 30,000 young people from 125 countries with scholarships to study in our universities are at this very moment attending their classes. Not one person was or will be neglected.

On behalf of the Government and people of Cuba, I would like to express our deep thanks to all those who, in one form or another, demonstrated their solidarity with and support for Cuba at that dramatic juncture. To date, we have received help from 64 countries.

In contrast to the extensive solidarity received and the affirmation made here this morning by the representative of the Government of the United States, to which I shall reply in good time, that Government responded with its customary cynicism and hypocrisy. It refused to respond to our request that we be allowed to buy food and essential materials for reconstruction with private credits from American companies — even for six months. On the other hand, it attempted to orchestrate a blatant propaganda campaign in which it tried to accuse our Government of not looking after its people.

As for Cuba, it has acted in keeping with its traditional principled positions. We cannot accept so-called assistance from those who have intensified the blockade, sanctions and hostility against our people. Cuba has not asked the United States Government for any gifts. We have simply asked to be allowed to make purchases.

Once again, the Bush Administration is lying to the international community. It is lying when it declares that it granted licences for $250 million in agricultural sales to our country after the hurricanes. Food sales have existed since 2001 and are not — as in the attempted explanation just made here — the result of a decision made after the devastating hurricanes to help Cuba. Food sales have existed since 2001. Acquiring such products is possible only under strict measures of supervision and after a complicated and bureaucratic process of granting licences, case by case, by the numerous institutions of the United States Government. Cuba, moreover, has to pay in cash and in advance. The reality is that the United States Government is continuously setting up more obstacles in order to limit those purchases.

If the United States Government was really concerned about the well-being of the Cuban people, the only moral and ethical act would be to lift the blockade imposed on my country in violation of the most elemental regulations of international law and the United Nations Charter.

To give an idea about the magnitude of the impact of the blockade policy on the Cuban people, just in economic terms, it would enough to say that in

one year it almost equals the estimated total damages caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

Hurricanes are natural phenomena that are aggravated by climate changes and global warming. Unfortunately, they cannot be avoided. The blockade is a genocidal and illegal policy. Unlike the hurricanes, the American authorities are able to put an end to this policy and spare the Cuban people their prolonged suffering.

The economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States Government against Cuba is the main obstacle to both the recovery of the Cuban people after the hurricanes and our economic and social development. Very conservative estimates reveal that direct accumulated damages caused by the blockade exceed $93 billion, almost twice our gross domestic product. At the current value of the dollar, that equals no less than $224.6 billion. It is not difficult to imagine all that Cuba could have achieved if, over these almost 50 years, it had not been subjected to that brutal economic war on a global scale.

In open contempt of the expressed will of the international community and of 16 consecutive General Assembly resolutions, the United States Government during this past year adopted new and tougher economic sanctions against Cuba. It intensified persecution against activities of Cuban companies and those of other countries and unleashed a mad hunt against our international financial transactions, including when we were trying to make our payments to United Nations bodies. Its malice has reached such an extent that it blocks Internet sites that have links to our country.

On the other hand, Washington has increased, to unprecedented levels, its financial and material support for actions to overthrow Cuban constitutional order. To that end, it has approved an additional $46 million for internal subversion in Cuba and another $39 million to maintain the illegal radio and television broadcasts against our country. Those funds alone are eight times greater that the so-called donation offered to Cuban people after the hurricanes. In a report drawn up by the Government Accountability Office of the American Government, published in November 2007, it is explicitly recognized that of the 20 programmes of sanctions applied to different countries, the blockade against Cuba constitutes an ensemble of economic sanctions that are the most extensive of any ever imposed by the United States.

The broad and documented report of the Secretary-General (A/63/93) with the contribution of 118 countries and 22 international bodies and agencies, relieves me from insisting here on the examples that prove that there is no aspect of Cuba's economic or social life that is not affected by the American blockade, from the impossibility of gaining access to consumables and equipment for paediatric cardiovascular surgery or for the tomography essential to modern oncology to the persecution by fines and imprisonment of American citizens travelling to Cuba and even of travel agencies that promote such travel, the United States Government ought to explain to the Assembly why it considers Cuban children who are suffering from heart disease to be enemies. Every year, the representatives of the Government of the United States lie to the Assembly when they repeat that such a blockade does not exist, that their measures are not the main causes of the shortages and suffering that the Cuban people have suffered, and continue to suffer, over the course of these years.

The blockade is not exclusively a bilateral matter between Cuba and the United States. The extraterritorial application of American laws and persecution of legitimate interests of companies and citizens of third countries — countries represented here in this Assembly — is a subject which concerns all the States assembled here.

The blockade also flagrantly violates the rights of the American people. It crushes their freedom to travel, sanctified in the very Constitution of the United States. In recent years, the Treasury Department has toughened its strict policy of refusing licences for religious, professional, cultural and student exchanges between the American and Cuban peoples. Moreover, the blockade impedes normal relations between Cubans residing in the United States and their relatives in Cuba.

Shortly, a new President will be elected in the United States. He should decide whether he will admit that the blockade is a failed policy that is steadily causing greater isolation and discrediting his country, or if he will stubbornly and cruelly persist in trying to wear out the Cuban people through hunger and disease.

From this podium, I repeat that the United States will never be able to vanquish the Cuban people. Neither blockades nor hurricanes will be able to

discourage us. No human or natural force will be able to subjugate the Cubans. By way of an example, there are those five Cuban heroes, fighters against terrorism, who have already spent a decade of unjust and cruel imprisonment in American jails and who are a symbol of the determination of our people to defend their liberty and independence with dignity.

I am grateful to the speakers who preceded me for their words of solidarity and encouragement to the Cuban people. I thank them for defending the right of Cubans, which today is also the right of every people represented here, and for upholding the Charter and international law.

I reject word for word the remarks made here by the representative of the United States Government. To him I say that those representatives of the United States Government in this Hall should feel a sense of shame. They are alone, in the greatest and deepest isolation. The world supports our small defiant island. I want to make it clear that we are not anti-American. We are anti-imperialist. We do not profess hatred for the American people, nor a spirit of revenge. We see the American people also as a victim, like us, of the illegal and absurd policy of their Government. Something other than power and military strength is needed. They should have figured that out by now. Moral authority is needed.

It is true that the United States has strength, but we have reason. It has no arguments. Every year, it repeats the same series of irrelevant and unconnected ideas, but we have all the valid arguments. They appear in the documents that have been circulated today and in our words. Its Secretary of State is not at this Assembly not only out of arrogance, but because she has nothing to say. Fear and shame also feature in that decision. The United States threatens. We never threaten. We ask for support from this Assembly with respect and chivalry. It uses lies. We use the truth. It is punishing our children, our elderly and our sick. We do not blame its people. Its people are also a victim. We offered it our doctors and their expertise to save lives and alleviate suffering at the time of hurricane Katrina. It did not allow us to send them. One day it will have to answer for that decision.

Its President will be leaving office in a few days. He tightened the embargo against Cuba to inconceivable limits. He took the economic war against us to a schizophrenic level. He threatened us with regime change, yet he will leave without achieving it. He is the tenth to leave office repeating the same failed illegal policy. It is true that the United States and its policy need to change. It is true that "We need change". It is also true that we need to change the world in which we live, one of demands and blackmail, and we need to build a world in which the rights of all peoples are respected. I affirm that "You cannot fool all the people all the time", as the great Abraham Lincoln asserted, whom our people also respect and pay tribute to.

The United States has said that its policy is very well known, and that is true. It has said that it is defending the right to trade between countries that wish to do so. Its policy is very well known, but what is not understood is why it maintains that policy when it is rejected universally and by its own people. It can decide not to trade with a country, but it does not have the right to persecute its own businessmen because they want to trade with or invest in Cuba, let alone persecute businessmen of other countries under the Helms-Burton law or other extraterritorial legislation.

It asks the Assembly not to consider the draft resolution that Cuba has put forward (A/63/L.4). Before the General Assembly, we insist on the importance and need to consider this draft resolution and to adopt it, because what is at stake here is not just Cuba's right, but the right of all.

The United States has talked about a dance of millions. It has repeated many figures — millions that it supposedly has offered. It is true that it offered us $5 million four times and we refused it, because our dignity cannot be bought for $5 million, or for $500 million, or for $5 billion or for $500 billion. That is what we said, if that is what they had in mind. It has said that the words of Ambassador Jorge Bolanos, chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, are unacceptable. Here I say once again, word for word: the embargo is a genocidal, illegal policy and should be lifted immediately, respecting the cry that has already been endorsed 16 times by this Assembly.

Finally, I would like to convey the feeling currently rousing our people and our island. They are closely following this debate. When my son was born in 1995, this Assembly had already voted against the United States blockade against Cuba. Now my son is 13 years old. When my daughter was born in 2000, this Assembly had already voted eight times against the

embargo. Now my daughter is eight years old. How much longer will Cuban children and young people have to wait for justice? How long will the Cuban people, who have received the unanimous support of this Assembly, have to wait before their rights are recognized and justice is done? How much longer will North American young people have to run the risk of being fined or jailed because they want to come to Cuba, visit our universities and meet our students? For how much longer will it be considered a crime for a citizen of a third country, one of the countries represented here today, to try to trade with or invest in Cuba? How much longer will there be an attempt to subjugate, through hunger and disease, children such as mine, who live in Cuba and dream and believe that a better world is possible, a world in which the dignity, independence and self-determination of all peoples are respected?

The representative of the United States has asked this Assembly not to support our draft resolution. We respectfully call upon all members to support Cuba, to support our rights and to support our draft resolution. On behalf of the Cuban people, who have proved a thousand times their heroic nature, who, despite adversity, have not been and will not be defeated and whose hope and happiness has not been embargoed or extinguished, I once again call on the solidarity of this Assembly. On behalf of the Cuban people, who put their faith in the decision that members must make in a few moments, I ask that members vote in favour of the draft resolution entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/63/L.4. A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Palau, United States of America

Abstaining:

Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of)

Draft resolution A/63/L.4 was adopted by 185 votes to 3, with 2 abstentions (resolution 63/7).

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of vote on the resolution just adopted, I would like to remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Lacroix (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Montenegro, the country of the European Free Trade Area Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this explanation of vote.

Mr. Siles Alvarado (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The European Union believes that the United States trade policy towards Cuba is fundamentally a bilateral issue. Nonetheless, the European Union and its member States have clearly expressed their opposition to the extraterritorial extension of the United States embargo, as contained in the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act of 1996.

The European Union cannot accept that unilateral measures imposed by the United States on specific countries limit the Union's economic and commercial relations with third countries, in this case Cuba. Therefore, in November 1996, the Council of Ministers of the European Union adopted a regulation and a joint action to protect the interests of natural or legal persons resident in the European Union against the extraterritorial effects of the Helms-Burton Act, prohibiting compliance with that law.

Moreover, on 18 May 1998, at the European Union-United States summit held in London, a package was agreed that included waivers to titles III and IV of the Helms-Burton Act; a commitment by the United States Administration to resist future extraterritorial legislation of that kind; and rules of conduct in order to protect investments. The European Union continues to urge the United States to implement the commitments it undertook under the 18 May 1998 agreement.

The European Union's policy towards Cuba is clear and was set out in a common position in 1996. The objective of the European Union in its relations with Cuba is to encourage a peaceful transition process, led by the Cuban people, to a pluralist democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, sustainable economic recovery and improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people.

The President returned to the Chair.

While reaffirming the validity of the common position of 1996, this past June the European Union decided to lift the restrictive measures against Cuba and propose a dialogue without preconditions to the Havana authorities, based on reciprocity and non-discrimination. The Cuban Government accepted the offer, and a ministerial political dialogue session was held in Paris on 16 October. The dialogue addressed all the issues of common interest, including human rights, an area in which Europeans expect concrete action from the authorities in Havana. In addition, the European Union will continue its dialogue with civil society and the democratic opposition.

In recent months, the human rights situation in Cuba has seen a few positive developments: Cuba's signing of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the visit of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food and the possibility of visits from other rapporteurs; and the commutation of death sentences to prison sentences.

However, the human rights situation in Cuba has not fundamentally changed, despite a decrease in the number of political prisoners and acts of harassment. The Cuban Government continues to deny its citizens internationally recognized civil, political and economic rights and freedoms. The European Union once again urges the Cuban Government to release unconditionally all political prisoners. That is one of the major priorities of the Union's policy concerning Cuba. In particular, the European Union expressed utmost concern about the deteriorating health of several political prisoners who are members of the group of 75 political prisoners detained since March 2003, and calls upon the Cuban authorities to release them immediately. The European Union also reiterates its call on the Cuban Government to grant freedom of expression and free access to information.

The Cuban Government's achievements in health care and education are undermined by its restrictions on civil, political and economic rights. Domestic Cuban economic policy and the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States seriously hamper the economic development of Cuba, negatively affecting the standards of living of the Cuban people.

With regard to the United States of America, we express our rejection of all unilateral measures against Cuba, which are contrary to the commonly accepted rules of international trade. We reaffirm our belief that the lifting of the United States trade embargo would help open Cuba's economy, to the benefit of the Cuban people. With regard to Cuba, the European Union urges the Cuban authorities to bring about real improvements in all the fields I have mentioned.

For all of those reasons, and in spite of the serious criticisms arising as a result of Cuba's human rights record, the European Union unanimously voted in favour of the resolution just adopted.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour of taking the floor on behalf of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and associated States: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and my own country, Brazil.

As in past years, the MERCOSUR States parties and associated States voted in favour of the draft resolution proposed by the Cuban delegation, as we believe that the embargo against that country is in violation of international law and is contrary to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The embargo has previously been condemned here in the United Nations and in other forums and international organizations such as the Organization of American States, the Latin American Economic System, the Latin American Summit and the Rio Group summits.

The position of MERCOSUR is based on the broader principle of defending multilateralism, non-intervention and the peaceful settlement of disputes, which are the fundamental principles of diplomacy in South America. The embargo against Cuba is not in line with the rules of the World Trade Organization, which regulate international trade through agreements that are binding for its members.

MERCOSUR member States and associated States condemn the application of unilateral coercive measures that impede free trade, that cause irreparable damage to the well-being of peoples and that obstruct the processes of regional integration. MERCOSUR and its associated States reject as a matter of principle unilateral and extraterritorial measures. That is another reason why we voted in favour of the draft resolution proposed by the Cuban delegation.

In voting in favour of this resolution, MERCOSUR and its associated States reiterated their commitment to multilateralism as a legitimate tool for dispute settlement between States and an effective instrument to promote international cooperation, human rights, security and understanding among peoples.

Mrs. Phommachanh (Lao People's Democratic Republic): The Lao People's Democratic Republic associates itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic reiterates its opposition to the continued unilateral imposition of the economic, commercial and financial embargo upon the Republic of Cuba by the Government of the United States of America. The embargo, with its extraterritorial implications, is in direct violation of the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter. Furthermore, it continues to cause untold suffering and hardship for the Cuban people and to hinder Cuba's progress in terms of socio-economic development.

The adoption of the relevant resolutions with the overwhelming support of the General Assembly for 16 consecutive years indicates the international community's rejection of unilateral coercive economic measures in general and to the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba in particular. The resolution just adopted once again confirms the friendship and solidarity of the international community with the Cuban people and calls for the immediate and unconditional lifting of the embargo against Cuba.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic believes in the importance of resolving differences between countries through peaceful dialogue and negotiation on the basis of equality and mutual respect for sovereignty. In that respect, the Lao People's

Democratic Republic reaffirms its continued support for the General Assembly's resolutions on this item and voted in favour of the resolution just adopted.

Mrs. Wahab (Indonesia): The delegation of Indonesia recognizes the importance of the Assembly's having adopted resolution 63/7, which deals with the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba. In addressing this issue, Indonesia aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Indonesia voted in favour of the resolution, as we consistently and strongly believe that the actions highlighted in the resolution run counter to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the right of peoples to life, well-being and development without distinctions of any kind. Indonesia is in full agreement with the rest of the international community on this issue. We urge an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba.

Mr. Swe (Myanmar): Myanmar joined the overwhelming majority of Member States in voting in favour of the resolution just adopted, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

Myanmar adheres to the five principles of peaceful coexistence, which are the cornerstone of our foreign policy. It is our strong belief that peace, security and stability can be promoted only through mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

The embargo imposed on Cuba not only runs counter to the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, it also violates the fundamental principle of the sovereignty, equality and right to development of the peoples of all nations. Furthermore, the promulgation and application by the United States of extraterritorial laws and regulations that affect the sovereignty of other States, the legitimate interests of entities or persons under their jurisdiction and freedom of trade and navigation violate universally accepted principles of international law.

My delegation strongly feels that the United States should heed the call by the international community and immediately put an end to the embargo against Cuba. The embargo does not in any way promote peace and stability in the region but instead has serious negative impacts on the social, political and economic development of the people of Cuba. My delegation therefore voted in favour of the resolution.

Mr. Rachkov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The General Assembly is once again discussing the question of the imposition on Cuba of an economic, commercial and financial embargo. Once again, here in this Hall, we have seen virtually unanimity regarding the necessity of ending the embargo and lifting the restrictions, which are damaging the vital interests of the people of Cuba and are indeed inhumane.

Belarus opposes the sanctions and the unilateral coercive measures imposed against Cuba. The sanctions are particularly inappropriate at a time when humankind is grappling with a number of global problems. The financial crisis, the resulting decline in economic development and the fact that the sustainable development of States is increasingly dependent on a wide range of factors, from building a just system of international trade to overcoming climate change, means that we must jointly face these challenges and counter them. In this new global context, there is no place for unilateral sanctions. By voting in favour of the resolution just adopted, we are calling on the United States to put an end to the embargo against the Republic of Cuba, an embargo that has been condemned by the international community.

Ms. Espinosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to state very briefly that we align ourselves with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Common Market of the South and associated States.

My delegation voted in favour of the resolution on the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba, in keeping with the principles of international law, the United Nations Charter and the recommendations adopted by the General Assembly.

The Government and the new constitution of Ecuador condemn the imposition of unilateral coercive measures, reject the threat or use of force to solve disputes and defend the principles of multilateralism, non-intervention and the peaceful settlement of

disputes. With that vote, Ecuador would like to reiterate its commitment to defending those principles and express its solidarity with the people of Cuba, whose most basic rights are being violated. Ecuador appeals to our common reason and intelligence to put an end to the blockade against Cuba. We feel that it is not only a violation of international law but also an attack on the human rights, dignity, freedom and happiness of the Cuban people.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation too would like briefly to echo the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. The text of our complete statement will be available to delegations; I will now deliver a summary of that text.

Despite repeated appeals by the General Assembly over the past 16 consecutive years, the Government of the United States of America has thus far done nothing to comply with the wishes of the international community. It deliberately and stubbornly maintains its misguided position, disregarding the just demands of the international community. In addition, the authorities of the United States of America have introduced new measures to tighten the blockade against Cuba, a sovereign and independent State.

The behaviour of the United States and the measures it has taken are detrimental to the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Cuba and constitute a direct threat to the stability of the region and a blatant threat to international peace and security.

In accordance with its jurisdiction, the Assembly is duty-bound to take the necessary measures to put an end to the economic sanctions, the embargo and the antagonistic policies of the United States against its immediate geographical neighbours and against other, more distant States.

In that connection, my delegation hopes that the embargoes imposed by the United States of America against Cuba and against numerous other States, including my country, the Syrian Arab Republic, will be lifted. We also hope that the United States of America will respect the voice of the international community as expressed here in the Assembly and that the institutions and other entities of that country will abide by the wishes of the international community in full. We therefore voted in favour of the resolution just adopted.

It was striking to note Israel's anomalous vote against the resolution just adopted, which was backed by the overwhelming majority of Member States. Israel's vote against the overwhelming majority is proof that it, too, pays no heed to international law and is part of an isolated minority in the international community. Israel's vote was highly detrimental to the United States of America.

Successive United States policies since the imposition of the unjust blockade on Cuba have used a variety of creative means to violate international law. These have taken on dangerous dimensions, due to the inconsistency of the mechanisms governing international relations in dealing with misguided United States policies towards the peoples and countries of the world. An inability to make use of established accountability mechanisms does not mean that history will fail to hold the United States of America responsible for its misguided decisions, which are in violation of international law. These include military invasions of States; changing Governments by force; fabricating internal disturbances in countries to pressure their Governments; arming aggressors; imposing unjust blockades and unilateral economic sanctions against States; conducting trials and establishing mobile prisons and detention centres outside the framework of international law; and committing flagrant acts of aggression against the borders of other States, including my country, the Syrian Arab Republic.

The question is: are those misguided American practices in conformity with the noble principles of the founding fathers and past leaders of the United States of America, such as George Washington, John Adams, Abraham Lincoln and Woodrow Wilson? I leave the answer to be given by American officials.

Mrs. Juul (Norway): Norway considers the United States embargo against Cuba to be fundamentally a bilateral issue. We support sanctions when they are adopted by the international community through the United Nations. But we cannot support the extraterritorial extension of unilateral measures against a third country. Therefore, we cannot accept that unilateral measures imposed by the United States should determine Norway's relations with Cuba.

Norway is encouraged by some positive developments in the area of human rights in Cuba. Cuba recently signed the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The visit of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food is a positive step. We particularly welcome the commutation of death sentences to prison sentences.

Nevertheless, Norway remains concerned about the protection and promotion of human rights in Cuba. We also reiterate our call on the Cuban Government to grant freedom of expression and free access to information.

Norway does not consider isolation to be an appropriate response to the developments in Cuba. More can be achieved through a constructive dialogue with the Government of Cuba. Moving forward, Norway intends to contribute to such a dialogue.

For those reasons, Norway just voted — as in previous years — for the resolution just adopted.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): As it has consistently done in the past, my delegation voted in favour of the resolution opposing the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba. It has gone beyond a bilateral matter. The embargo is unjustified. It has had an adverse impact on the people of Cuba for too long.

Furthermore, we do not support unilateral measures with extraterritorial application, which we believe are inconsistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and humanitarian law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have now heard the last speaker in explanation of vote.

Once again we, the international community, the entire world, the representatives of "we the peoples", in whose names the United Nations was founded, have expressed our rejection of the illegal and criminal blockade imposed on Cuba, a heroic country of unfailing solidarity. We have also heard many statements of respect and appreciation for our brother Fidel Castro and all his noble people.

As President of the General Assembly, it is up to me, inter alia, in all times and in all places to defend the letter and the spirit of our Charter, taking into account the fact that the cause of peace obliges all of us to respect and enforce respect for the principles and standards set out in the Charter. There is nothing more counter to the spirit and letter of the Charter than the blockade maintained by the United States against Cuba. The blockade against Cuba, which has so rightly been repudiated and condemned with a unanimity from which it seems only the aggressor is excluded, must be ended once and for all.

In view of recent events in Cuba and the damage caused by Hurricane Ike, which hit the island right after Hurricane Gustav, maintaining that blockade, in addition to all that has been said already on the subject, is clearly an act of extreme cruelty. Cuba deserves all our respect, our love and our solidarity.

I pray that our dear brothers and sisters who have insisted on maintaining that criminal blockade against Cuba at all costs will find within themselves the moral strength to set themselves free from this unwholesome stubbornness and will then be able to put an immediate end to the blockade.

To Fidel, who is undeniably a hero of international solidarity, and to all the wonderful people of Cuba, I express our unwavering respect and solidarity. We will do everything possible — and impossible — to ensure that the overwhelming opinion manifested here in the United Nations is no longer flouted. Viva Cuba!

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 19?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.